

MAGONIA ETH Bulletin

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EDITORIAL

Magonia has become well known among many ufologists for its espousal of the psychosocial theory of UFOs. It is generally agreed that the vast majority of UFO reports can be explained as misidentifications of aircraft or natural phenomena. According to the psychosocial theory, all reports which cannot reasonably be explained in this way must have psychological explanations. These include optical illusions, delusions, hallucinations, dreams and fantasies, confabulations, lies, hoaxes, etc.

However, there has been constant criticism from those who insist that some UFO reports indicate that the Earth is being visited by extraterrestrials, and that these reports are unfairly dismissed or distorted by proponents of the psychosocial theory. They are said to be indulging in 'armchair ufology' or 'literary criticism'

Magonia ETH Bulletin has been initiated, as a supplementary publication to *Magonia*, in order to examine the evidence that ETH supporters apparently find so compelling. We hope to examine and re-examine interesting reports in the hope of eventually reaching a consensus among intelligent ufologists as to whether or not the ETH should be taken seriously.

Articles or letters on this subject, whether opposing or supporting the ETH, are welcome.

THE ETH AND ITS PROPONENTS

ETH and PSH

Supporters of the ETH constantly assert that there is evidence in favour of it, and that it is much simpler and makes fewer assumptions than other theories which attempt to explain UFO reports. The only serious alternative to the ETH is the psychosocial hypothesis (PSH). What ETH supporters do not realise, however, is that even if a few UFO reports turned out to be genuine sightings of extraterrestrial space craft, then the PSH would still be valid, as it would still be the preferred explanation for the overwhelming majority of reports.

More than one ETH

The ETH does indeed seem simple at first glance. Just examine some of the most reliable and puzzling reports, obtain that elusive physical evidence, and become famous as the one who finally convinces the disbelieving scientific community that we really are being visited by ETs. In fact it is not so simple, as there is more than one ETH. The Greys described by the abductee enthusiasts such as Hopkins, Mack and Jacobs have amazing powers. These include 'selective invisibility' and the ability to abduct people through solid walls. These Greys are not infallible; they sometimes get the abductees' night clothes or underwear mixed up or return them to the garden instead of the bedroom. Somehow, though, nothing ever goes seriously wrong, so they never get caught. How fortunate they are compared with those other Greys - the ones who seem to have established, over the past 50 years, a special relationship with the almost omnipotent US Air Force. When they crash their saucers in the desert there are no back-up craft to rescue them, so survivors are forced to spend the rest of their miserable lives incarcerated at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Even if they crash in another country thousands of miles from the

USA they are still likely to end up there. For example, the aliens who crash-landed near Varginha, Brazil, were said to have been handed over to the USAF.

Jerome Clark's support for the ETH

In the USA, one of the leading ETH proponents is Jerome Clark. He sees possible evidence in reports involving alleged physical traces, radar-visual sightings and multi-witness reports. He is thus a 'nuts-and-bolts' ETH'er. In order to let the ETH breathe, it is necessary to free it from the all-embracing tentacles of the PSH. Clark does this by suggesting that PSH proponents are ignorant and prejudiced (in contrast with the brilliant scientists who support the ETH). For example, he writes:

Criticisms of the ETH also came from supporters of the neoskeptical psychosocial hypothesis, which sought to explain close encounters as culturally shaped hallucinations and visionary experiences. Generally speaking, psychosocial theorists, who came mostly from liberal-arts backgrounds, had little interest in science as such and thus seldom employed scientifically based arguments like Hynek's. Nor did they much concern themselves with the hard evidence, such as that to be found in close encounters of the second kind, and they usually did not discriminate between outlandish claims and those others considered credible. Most seemed to believe the ETH to be inherently absurd and insisted that reported extraterrestrials were either too much or too little like us to merit credibility. (1)

There is some truth in the allegation that many PSH supporters are disturbingly ignorant of basic science, but this hardly applies to the more prominent ones. Many people regard psychology and sociology as being only marginally scientific disciplines, in contrast with the 'hard' sciences such as physics. It is thus easier for physical scientists to gain respect for their opinions, whether or not they are justified by the facts.

Brain scanning

However, recent advances in neurophysiology, and brain scanning and imaging are making it possible for people who claim strange experiences, such as close encounters, to be subjected to more rigorously scientific tests. The question as to whether or not UFO witnesses are fantasy-prone persons can be established objectively, rather than being decided merely by the subjective impressions of psychologists. A team of researchers in Canada, led by Henry Szechtman of McMaster University in Hamilton, hypnotised 14 male volunteers, knowing that some were prone to hallucinations and others not. Their brains were scanned while they performed three tasks: listening as a taped message was played, imagining it being played, and listening as though it were being played. In the last task those subject to hallucinations reported hearing the message. This task activated a spot in their brains' anterior cingulate. Szechtman believes that this region allocates an 'external' tag to internal thoughts, making them seem real. (2) The implications of this and similar experiments are obvious to serious investigators of close encounters, abductions, and alleged paranormal experiences.

Hard evidence

PSH proponents do not concern themselves with 'hard evidence'. What hard evidence? In 50 years of ufology none has yet come to hand. All we ever get are holes in the ground, bits of slag and fuzzy photographs. Some of the so-called scientific investigations of such evidence have been pathetically inadequate or incompetent, as has been devastatingly revealed by serious UFO researchers such as Mailliot (3) and Simpson. (4)

As for distinguishing between 'outlandish claims and those others considered credible', what are the criteria to be used in making such distinctions? In practice, the classification of such reports depends on the personal preferences of the ufologists. For example, many American ufologists prefer the crash-retrieval stories. When challenged concerning the complete absence of any evidence to support them, apart from often contradictory accounts by alleged witnesses, they can say that the incidents took place either a long time ago, or in some remote place where they don't speak American, and that the US Air Force has removed all the physical evidence. Others put their faith in radar-visual sightings which, if taken at face value, seem to indicate the operation of craft whose performance vastly exceeds that of any earthly machines. Experts on aviation and radar should be warned that such folk do not take kindly to complicated, boring and irritatingly rational explanations of such incidents.

The ETH in Britain

In Britain there is less enthusiasm for the ETH among ufologists, but those people who like to read UFO books are quite keen on it, judging by the sales figures for British ETH enthusiasts such as Timothy Good and Nick Pope. This is not because British ufologists are saner than American ones, it is because they are more keen on barmy occult speculations, 'earth energies', imaginary secret aircraft, etc.

One very prolific British UFO writer who manages to upset many of these folk is Jenny Randles. She is also not rich because she often fails to tell the punters what they want to hear. They are particularly unhappy about a certain basic law of ufology which she has derived from her extensive readings and investigations. This law states: 'The more witnesses there are, the less likely it's really a UFO.' (5)

The Oz Factor

The importance of the law derived by Jenny Randles cannot be overestimated. It could provide the key to the whole UFO mystery. Randles has pointed out that the experience of having a close encounter with a UFO is quite different from that of viewing some unusual phenomenon together with many other witnesses. The Oz Factor appears to be an altered state of consciousness experienced by witnesses to the more bizarre UFO experiences. For example, some people report seeing a UFO while walking along a busy street or driving on a busy road, but when the UFO is seen everything seems to go quiet and cars and pedestrians seem to have vanished. At the end of the experience everything returns to normal. Investigators find that nobody else in the vicinity at the time had noticed anything unusual. Such observations point inevitably to a psychological explanation, and the details of such experiences suggest a social explanation.

We are thus now closer to knowing what to look for when seeking UFO reports that tend to lend support to the ETH. They must be multiple witness reports, preferably backed by some form of physical evidence. There should be no serious doubt that the reported events actually took place. The only arguments should concern the matter of the correct explanation, based on agreed evidence and testimony.

Trinidad Island

The Trinidad Island sighting of 16 January 1958 should provide a good case for consideration by ETH proponents. Four reasonably good photographs of a mysterious Saturn-shaped flying object taken from the deck of the Brazilian Navy vessel *Almirante Saldanha* and plenty of witnesses. Jerome Clark's verdict on it is:

Given the number of witnesses, the results of photoanalyses both military and civilian, and the need for debunkers to reinvent the incident to 'explain' it, it seems most unlikely that the Trinidad photographs were hoaxed. (6)

Well, what are the agreed facts of this case? I was astonished to discover, on re-examining the literature on this incident that some of the most basic and presumably easily ascertainable facts are very much in dispute. For example, how many witnesses were there? Well, it depends on whether you are a believer or a sceptic. And if you are a sceptic it depends whether you believe the photographs were faked or that they are genuine and that they portray an aircraft or some natural phenomenon. Dr Menzel originally thought the photographs showed an aircraft flying through cloud, but eventually claimed that they were faked.

Believers conveniently fail to mention something about the photographer that the sceptics gleefully emphasise: he was well known for his trick photography. I wonder why?

Now we come to the really crazy bit. When we ask the obvious question: How many witnesses were there? - what is the answer? Again, it depends entirely on whether you are a believer or a sceptic. According to Coral Lorenzen: 'Rio de Janeiro's *Ultima Hora* on February 21 reported that at least a hundred individuals had witnessed the sighting of the object . . . ' (7) The US Naval Attaché in Rio de Janeiro, evidently a dedicated sceptic, wrote in his report to Project Blue Book:

'The Assistant Naval Attaché . . . had an opportunity to visit aboard [the *Almirante Saldanha*]. The commanding officer . . . had not seen the object and was noncommittal. The executive officer also had not seen it but, arriving shortly thereafter, had formed the opinion that those

on deck had seen it. The captain reported that his secretary, a LCDR, had seen it but this officer when personally questioned avoided discussing the matter. (8)

Sceptics insist that there were no witnesses, despite assertions from believers that their testimonies were published in Brazilian newspapers. If there really were many witnesses, then the photographs are hardly likely to be fakes. If there were no witnesses, it is difficult to see how people could be fooled by a photographer who purported to take pictures of something which nobody else noticed from the crowded deck of a ship.

Conclusions

Most investigations of what seem like inexplicable UFO reports founder, either because the investigators have made up their minds before they start, or because there is really no substance to the reports anyway. Without reliable reports and unbiased investigations the outlook for the ETH remains bleak.

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PER ARDUA AD ASBESTOS

What usually happens to people who publicly criticise the policies and activities of the private companies, local authorities or government departments which employ them? They get the sack, of course. Or at least they are subject to some form of disciplinary action. Not so UFO author, ETH believer and MoD civil servant Nick Pope. He has constantly criticised his department's insistence that the UFOs, whatever they might be, are fairly harmless. Now he has gone even further. In his column in the magazine *Sightings* (Volume 2, Issue 9, 1998) he writes:

Under British law, any UK citizen involved in a UFO cover-up might - if the extraterrestrials are committing hostile acts - be committing the offence of treason . . . This leaves open the question of anyone involved in official UFO research who should have been aware of a threat, but failed to act because of their own ignorance or prejudice. If a hostile act then occurs, which could have been prevented had the person concerned taken the subject seriously, the person concerned might face a treason charge.

I think most employees would not expect to get away with this sort of insinuation, but Pope appears to be fireproof. Why? What is going on? Could someone explain?

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